



Emergency Management **UPDATE**

March 2000

Storms prompt call to “snowbusters”

Who do you call when back-to-back snow and ice storms threaten to freeze the state's services and gridlock the transportation network? If you are Governor Jim Gilmore, you launch a preemptive strike to ensure the availability of life safety services for Virginia's citizens.

On Jan. 25, Gilmore declared a state of emergency following a fierce winter storm that dumped 15 to 18 inches of snow in a number of localities across the Commonwealth. The Virginia Emergency Operations Center (VEOC) maintained a heightened state of readiness even before the first snowflake fell and went into 24-hour augmented operations on Super Bowl Sunday as blizzard conditions gave way to icy rain.

While widespread power outages dampened festivities for more than 300,000 households affected by both storms, coordinators at the state and local levels were coping with the critical issue of access to emergency services.

The Virginia National Guard also positioned a total of 466 personnel at 21 different armories around the state. According to Public Affairs Officer Maj. Tom Wilkinson, they performed a variety of missions throughout the crisis including transporting Virginia State Police personnel to their posts in Richmond and staff to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in Petersburg.

Dialysis patients and those with life-threatening needs for medication were a priority in numerous localities. In Emporia and Mecklenburg County, the National Guard was on the job as mountains of cleared snow created a dilemma for rescue crews trying to respond to emergency calls.

“It was the first time we’ve used the National Guard,” says Emergency Services Coordinator H. Wayne Carter, III. “Their charge was to go out with the rescue squad in areas we couldn’t reach. They went out on pretty much all of our rescue calls and put the stretchers in humvees and trucks.”

“On one call, a lady was in insulin shock with a blood sugar level of 30,” Carter adds. “It would’ve taken 30-45 minutes to get to her in a four-wheel drive vehicle. She was right on the edge of diabetic shock and wouldn’t have made it otherwise.”

Downed trees posed a problem as well, and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), Virginia Power, National Guard and local crews pitched in to open up thoroughfares across the state. In Powhatan County, Fire Chief Pat Schoeffel says teams from the National Guard worked with VDOT and fire company crews to remove trees and other debris blocking roads.



Removing roadblocks. VDOT crews cut trees in Chesterfield County (Photo by Barbara Daugherty, VDOT Public Affairs).

“We had 18 inches of snow and did relatively well,” says Chesterfield County Emergency Services Coordinator Lynda Furr Price. “However, we were hit pretty hard in terms of trees down following the ice storm. We had our own crews working with VDOT and Virginia Power to clear roads.”

Numerous localities encountered more problems with the ice than the snowstorm. In Emporia, Emergency Services Coordinator C. Eugene Wills says they had a difficult time trying to clear the city streets of ice with only a small window of opportunity during the day before freezing temperatures returned at night.

Local EOCs opened at this time to address sheltering issues during the power outage. In Chesterfield, Price says they opened their EOC during the ice storm and sheltered nine people through social services. She says they also worked with Virginia Power to expedite service restoration to a group home with 110 residents.

Other collateral issues emerged during the crisis. While a week without mail delivery may be inconvenient, an extended disruption of garbage collection can become a major problem. In Mecklenburg, Carter says they had to hire contractors to remove snow around refuse areas and rent heavy equipment to clear out around dumpsters.

What if your rescuers needed a little rescuing or your wharf gets washed away?

(continued on page 4)

Hazmat and the art of the highway closure

By Greg Britt

VDES Hazmat Field Manager

What comes to mind when you hear about a hazmat incident that has closed a major highway? Your answer probably depends on your relationship to the incident.

Concerned citizens, firefighters, law enforcement officers, emergency medical technicians/paramedics, the media and the many responding state and local agencies all have different priorities and agendas. When a HAZMAT accident occurs on a highway, however, these concerns become subordinate to life safety issues.

The first responder is expected to recognize the presence of hazardous materials, protect himself and the public, secure the area and call for assistance. While secondary units are responding, other problems must be addressed.

Are there injuries or fatalities? Are additional vehicles involved? Has there been a chemical release? If so, is it poisonous, flammable or explosive? Has anyone been exposed to the chemical? These are just a few questions that may arise in the mind of a public safety officer.

According to the *Code of Virginia*, Section 27-15, the fire chief or ranking fire official is in charge of incidents involving fire or hazmat. However, large-scale incidents require assistance from a number of agencies with different disciplines. Many actions may have to take place simultaneously.

If traffic has to be detoured, this becomes a state trooper's worst nightmare. Consider the black powder incident that occurred in Northern Virginia last June. Interstate 95 was closed in this area of the state for more than 16 hours, producing a rippling traffic effect on the entire Mid-Atlantic region. Secondary roads and communities quickly became overwhelmed with traffic. Citizens had to be evacuated, and additional accidents occurred on the detoured routes. State and local police and VDOT were the major players in managing this portion of the incident.

Often other emergencies like secondary accidents and medical emergencies such as heart attacks, childbirth, diabetic- and temperature-related illnesses can occur during these incidents. The snarled traffic often slows the response to these emergencies, further complicating the situation.

Fire departments are overwhelmed with command decisions, fire-suppression issues and hazmat operations, along with ensuring public safety. These demands also affect the surrounding public safety departments who may be called upon to provide resources to assist with the incident. A number of localities do not have hazmat teams or adequate personnel and equipment to maintain a high-level presence in a long-term incident.

Of course this story would not be complete without the media. If they are mismanaged, the incident could become a calamity.



Unplanned rest stop. Highways can become parking lots when incidents such as this 1999 truck rollover in Louisa County occur.

However, if handled properly, the media can be one of your most valuable assets. They can inform the public about the situation and the hazards involved. They can provide information on evacuations or detours, affected areas, and recommended actions. In exchange, they will want live shots of the incident and interviews, which can be accomplished in most situations.

As you can see, there are many tasks at hand in a large-scale incident, and numerous local and state agencies will need to have a clear understanding of their roles beforehand to effectively coordinate their efforts. Although the fire chief is in charge, all major disciplines provide input relating to their functional area.

We all have the common goals of safely containing the hazardous substance, cleaning up the area to an acceptable level and re-opening the highway. Prior interactions such as exchanging information and conducting drills and exercises will pay major dividends for responders and citizens alike.

Jordan to pilot new course for hazmat



In February, Poquoson native Tom Jordan charted a course to Richmond to join the Technological Hazards Division crew. With a focus on curriculum development, the agency's newest technical instructor will help pilot hazmat training in 2000 and beyond.

Jordan comes to the agency with more than five years' experience with the Poquoson Fire Department where he honed his talent for teaching by serving not only as a firefighter but also a preceptor for all new hires to the department. He is a certified hazardous materials technician and has served as a representative to the regional Fire Academy Training Board.

"Tom's past involvement in teaching and course development will make him a vital member of our branch," Technological Hazards Training Supervisor Ron Hargrave says. "We look forward to his contributions."

Jordan is currently finishing course work for his bachelor of science degree at Christopher Newport College with a major in biology and a minor in chemistry. The maritime operations expert is also an avid boater who enjoys spending most of his free time on the water.

Forums to highlight hurricane hazards

For hundreds of years, lighthouses have cast their beacons through fog and storm-tossed seas to keep sailors from dashing their vessels on the rocks below. Though many lighthouses have gone the way of the horse and buggy, the concept of an early warning system has not.

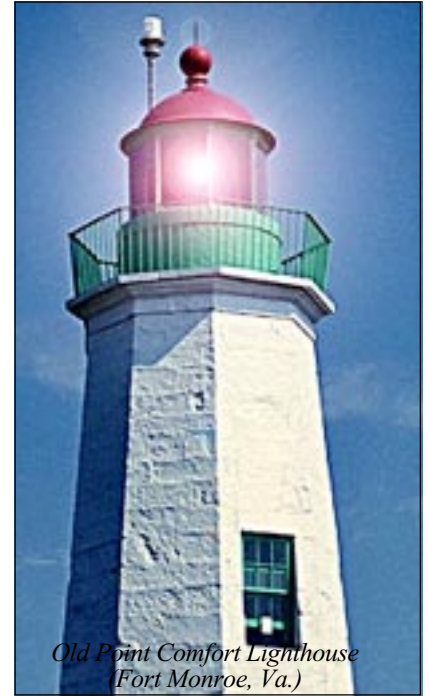
Each year, emergency managers across the nation lift the torch aloft to remind citizens of the potential dangers of hurricanes — nature's most colossal storms. Born of the ocean, hurricanes breed and thrive from June 1 through Nov. 30 and can have disastrous effects far inland. On April 17-21, emergency managers will gather in New Orleans, La., to compare notes on the 1999 season and prepare for the uncertainties of 2000 at the National Hurricane Conference.

As heavy rains from weakening tropical systems have led to the state's worst disasters, Virginia will capitalize on the memory of recent devastation from Dennis and Floyd to highlight the preparedness and mitigation messages during Hurricane Preparedness Week June 4-10, 2000.

News releases, statistical data and the proclamation from Governor Jim Gilmore will be available on the VDES Web site. Additionally, information packets will be forwarded to the field during the month of May.

For more information on the National Hurricane Conference, visit their Web site at www.hurricanecon.com, call (850) 906-9224 or fax requests to (850) 906-9228. Online registration is also available through the Web site.

Contact Janet Clements at (804) 897-6510 to learn more about Virginia's Hurricane Preparedness Week.



A room with a view. Hurricane Dennis damage adds to Va. tally.

Disaster costs reach record in '99

Thanks to hurricanes Dennis and Floyd, Virginia ranks fourth among states hardest hit by disasters in 1999. According to figures from the Insurance Services Office's Property Claim Services reports, the 27 catastrophic disasters that hit the United States last year will cost insurers \$8.2 billion — the fifth highest amount in the last 50 years. The top ten list follows:

Oklahoma	\$1.1 Billion	May tornadoes
North Carolina	\$928 Million	Dennis, Floyd
Texas	\$515 Million	Severe weather
Virginia	\$485 Million	Dennis, Floyd
Michigan	\$375 Million	Severe weather
Ohio	\$375 Million	Severe weather
Arkansas	\$325 Million	Severe weather
Pennsylvania	\$255 Million	Floyd
New York	\$239 Million	Severe weather
Florida	\$222 Million	Floyd, Irene

(Excerpted from *Emergency Preparedness News*, Feb. 1, 2000)

Urquhart heeds Governor's call

VDES lost a great friend and mentor with the departure of Preparedness and Mitigation Division Director George Urquhart on Jan. 31 to accept a gubernatorial appointment as executive director of the Commission on Local Government.

A member of the VDES family since 1979, Urquhart served as the state's liaison officer to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission as well as the VDES legislative liaison. He held numerous positions within the agency including director and deputy director posts with the Plans Division.

"I want to thank all the agencies and local governments who have given me the opportunity to aid in advancing the emergency services discipline across the state," says Urquhart.

"I owe a great debt to many of you who have shared your wisdom with me and been part of the great team here at VDES. I look forward to maintaining these networking relationships and supporting local governments in championing life safety issues in the future."

To contact George Urquhart, write to the following address: Commonwealth of Virginia, Commission on Local Government, Pocahontas Building, 900 East Main Street, Suite 103, Richmond, Va., 23219-3513. He may also be reached by phone at (804) 786-6508 or fax at (804) 371-7999.



Training Calendar

Emergency Management

Mass Fatalities Incident Mgmt.
March 28-30/Fairfax

EOC Mgmt. and Operations
April 4-6/Charlottesville

**Hazardous Weather and
Flooding Preparedness**
April 11-13/Abingdon

Exercise Design
April 18-19/Richmond

Principles of Emergency Mgmt.
May 2-4/Richmond

**Basic Public Information Officer
Course** — May 3-5/Williamsburg

Reservist Training

**State Emergency Response
Team Exercise (SERTEX 2000)**
March 8/VEOC

**Information and Planning
Branch PDA Team
Deployment Exercise**
April 26/Richmond

**VEOC Message/Mission Flow
Exercise** — May 3/Richmond

Reservist Seminar
May 16/Roanoke

Search and Rescue

Field Team Member (II)
March 10-12/Newport News Park

CAP-Sponsored GSAR (I)
March 17-19/Fort A.P. Hill

Inland SAR School
March 27-31/Yorktown

State SAR Simulation
April 7-9/Chesterfield Airport

CAP-Sponsored GSAR (II)
April 12-16/Fort A.P. Hill

SAR Council
April 29/Richmond

Technological Hazards

Team Leaders Meeting
March 28-29/Portsmouth

Hazmat Technician
April 3-14/Ashland

It's not too late ...



*"Igniting the Power
of Partnerships"*
March 20-22
Williamsburg, Va.

Reserve your space by
calling (757) 474-3096,
visiting the VDES Web site at
www.vdes.state.va.us or
simply register at the door!

Virtual meetings to master disasters

Have you ever wished you could be in two places at one time? Well, the Emergency Information Infrastructure Partnership (EIIP) has a solution for you.

EIIP has created a virtual meeting place to overcome barriers of time, distance and professional affiliation. With quarterly virtual forums, emergency managers can exchange information and ideas about natural/man-made disasters in an interactive environment. Upcoming programs include:

- ◆ **Virtual Classroom** – “Storm Ready” with John Ogren, NOAA, March 8, Noon EST
 - ◆ **Forum** – “Spring Break/Student Day,” Dan Robeson, President, International Emergency Management Students Association (IEMSA), March 15, Noon EST
 - ◆ **“Co-opting Customer Competence: What are the implications for emergency management?”** Group Discussion led by Amy Sebring, March 22, Noon EST
 - ◆ **Tech Arena** – **SALEMDUG Technology Certification Program** with Preston Cook, SALEMDUG President, and Walter Green, University of Richmond, March 29, Noon EST
- Log on at www.emforum.org/vforum/formchat.htm to participate!



Snowbusters (continued from page 1)

After a close call with a car, Schoeffel says Powhatan firefighters provided a vehicle to follow the National Guard to ensure the camouflaged vehicle wouldn't blend in **too** well with the surroundings. Essex County Emergency Services Coordinator Larry Smith says ice floating down the Rappahannock River pulled pilings out of the river bottom, taking out some wharves with it.

When the snow and ice finally melted, the price tag for these dual storms came in at more than \$25.7 million, making this one of the costliest winters for the state and affected localities.



10501 Trade Court
Richmond, VA 23236-3713

Address Correction Requested
Return Postage Guaranteed

Bulk Rate
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 436
Richmond, VA

UPDATE is a monthly publication of the Virginia Department of Emergency Services. For permission to reprint articles in your publication or on the Internet, please call 804/897-6510.

State Coordinator Michael Cline
Executive Editor ... Janet L. Clements
Managing Editor...Barbara B. Bowen

Access the VDES homepage at:
<http://www.vdes.state.va.us>

© COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA 2000